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RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8571
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2840
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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND SCA/RA

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SUBJECT: MALDIVES: INTERNATIONAL DONORS MEET TO PLAN
ELECTION SUPPORT

REF: COLOMBO 496

1. (U) Summary. Representatives from interested donor countries met in Colombo on June 20 to review the status of preparation for Maldives' presidential election in Fall 2008, discuss the assistance plans of the UN, Commonwealth Secretariat (CS) and European Union, and identify individual donor's pledges of support to the election process.

Tight Timeline for Election Preparation

2. (SBU) UK Deputy High Commission Mark Goodman reported that the GORM now says elections will most likely be held in October, after Ramadan. For now, he said, the GORM is not considering a further postponement and is not ready to question the constitutional deadline of November 10 for swearing in a new president. NGO Transparency Maldives gave a presentation to the donor group on the status of election preparations. The group concluded that, even with the delay of the election to October, time is very tight to allow the constitution to be ratified, implementing legislation to be passed, and for key commissions and institutions to begin operating in time to oversee the election effectively. TM noted that even under the best scenario, the commissions will have only a month to operate before the election, giving them very little time to prepare for elections.

International Support to the Election Process

3. (SBU) The UN has indicated that no final decision has been made on what level of support it will provide to the election process. Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid, however, has indicated that the UN intends to play little, if any, role in the upcoming presidential election.

4. (SBU) The Commonwealth Secretariat is still formulating its approach. A scoping mission is planned for August to help determine the appropriate level of support. At a minimum, the CS is likely to be present on the day of the vote and to issue a statement on the result. According to Goodman, the CS plans to coordinate its efforts closely with the EU.

5. (SBU) The EU plans two stages of support. A four-member European Commission (EC) preparation team is already in place

in Male' and will stay until the election. This team will advise the GORM on preparing election legislation, educating voters, and developing a complaints and appeals procedure. A three-member EC reporting team will be deployed one month before the election and will stay until two weeks after the vote to report on the election. The EU plans to issue an EU Presidency Statement on the day of the election. The reporting team will not be a full EU Election Observation Mission, but will produce a detailed report on the performance of the election for the EC and EU, which may be circulated more widely.

¶6. (SBU) Eleven missions in Colombo have indicated their desire to support the election process by providing short-term diplomatic observers (STDOS). At least 20 observers from these missions (EC, Australia, Italy, Germany, US, Norway, UK, Switzerland, Canada, France, Netherlands) will augment the EC reporting team's observation efforts. Individual sponsoring countries will be responsible for funding their own observers but some logistical and coordination work will be handled by the EC. The STDOS will be deployed primarily to polling stations in major population centers, but some will go to more distant peripheral atolls. They will be deployed for between 4 and 10 days, depending on the needs and budgets of the donating missions. The EC reporting team will help train the STDOS in election observation methodology. All information from these efforts will be shared with all participating missions and the CS so that any statements issued are based on the same raw data.

Next Steps

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¶7. (SBU) The donor countries agreed to meet again in late July or early August to confirm support and review deployment schedules. The UK offered to prepare some draft common messages on the elections so that the donors can better deliver a consistent message to the GORM. Australia undertook to check into and report on whether SAARC is planning to provide any election assistance. The UK and EC agreed to update the GORM CS plans and to seek GORM agreement on hotel and transport arrangements for observers.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: The donor community's combined efforts and resources will gather many small contributions into one meaningful package. A group of 20 or more observers should be able to get a good sense of how well the election is run. Key challenges in organizing this observer effort will be the short timeline for planning and continuing uncertainty about the date of the election. It will be important to encourage the GORM's progress on reform without condoning elections before the necessary independent institutions are in place.
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